

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Caesar and Cleopatra and Antony and Cleopatra-Ziegfeld, 12/19/51. Presented on alternate nights by Gilbert Miller, starring Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier in revivals of the Shaw and Shakespeare versions of the legend. Robert Helpmann is featured in the supporting casts, both productions directed by Michael Benthall.

Digests of Current Reviews -- more on Page 3

The Grand Tour-Martin Beck, 12/10/51. Unanimous, but mild "con" reviews filed by daily appraisers on Elmer Rice's new play presented by the Playwrights' Company. Beatrice Straight was complimented by all for her long, difficult role, while opinions differed on Richard Derr's co-starring role. Widely diverse views reported on Howard Bay's imaginative backdrops, ranging from dull to show stealers. Main complaint was that script lets down in second act, when it switches from a tender love story to an involved melodrama. Times, Mirror and World Telegram & Sun critics would have voted "pro" on the first act, but they feared tired second act made for a dull evening. Chapman, News, suggested Rice would have been wiser if he told sentimental tale in a novel; while Kerr, Herald Tribune, thought it all sounded like a library reading at tea time. McClain, Journal American, thought Derr was miscast. William A. Lee won plaudits in small role. Rice's direction didn't phase the critics one way or the other.

The Constant Wife-National, 12/8/51. Katharine Cornell's revival of the 1926 Somerset Maugham comedy brought life to a dull season, commented most of the daily reviewers. Taken as a period piece or taken as a modern comedy, all but Chapman, News, praised it. Latter considered it a warmed over Candida with Miss Cornell in her usual role. After granting that it was a delight because it brought Cornell, Grace George and Brian Ahern on the same stage, Atkinson, Times, noted that Maugham's mechanical wit wasn't exactly suited to Cornell's best qualities. Direction by Guthrie McClintic was deemed perfect, as was Donald Oenslager's setting. Coleman, Mirror, remembered that he didn't like the original with Ethel Barrymore; but praised present production as veritable gem in dull season. Grace George's performance would be worth the price of admission, praised Watts, Post.

I Am A Camera-Empire, 11/28/51. Weekly reviewers generally agreed with their daily colleagues that Julie Harris' performance in John van Druten's adaptation of the Christopher Isherwood stories, presented by Gertrude Macy, is among the highlights of past seasons. But they worried a bit about the lack of plot in the script. Gibbs, New Yorker, complained that van Druten tended at times to be naive, obvious and immature, but he recommended acting and play. Hobe, Variety, and Gabriel, Cue, highlighted superb direction by adapter; latter billing him as one of the finest directors in the land. William Prince, Martin Brooks, Marian Winters and others were all praised by magazine reviewers. Impression of all was that it was interesting, though not perfect. Only Shipley, New Leader, panned script as sentimental putty.

Out of Town Reviews

Theatre Guild's forthcoming Legend of Lovers, an adaptation of Anouilh's French play by Kitty Black, stands a good chance of Broadway success, predicts Eck, Variety, after Hartford debut, thanks to fine cast headed by Dorothy McGuire and Hugh Griffith. It is due at the Plymouth on December 26th.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "yes."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.

None: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 13.

BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51

Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-27-28.

None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32-33.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

Con: 19-22-26-28. None: 10-14-21-23. So-So: 3.

FAITHFULLY YOURS-10/18/51

Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-12-15-18-20-21-22-25-29-30-33.

None: 13-14-16-17-19-24-26-27-28-31-32.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51

Con: 2-6-15-16-27-30-33.

None: 14-18-22-24-26-28-29-31-32.

GIGI-11/24/51

Con: 1-4-5-6-8. None: 12 thru 17-19 thru 33.

GLAD TIDINGS-10/11/51

Con: 1-2-4-5-6-7-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-29-30-33.

None: 10-12-14-16-21-22-27-28-31-32.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

Con: 26. None: 10-21.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.

I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51

Con: 3-5-7. So-So: 1. None: 10-12 thru 33.

NINA-12/5/51

Con: 1 thru 11. So-So: 18.

None: 12-13-14-15-16-17-19 thru 33.

THE NUMBER-10/30/51

Con: 1-2-4-8-9-17-19-20-21-23-24-25.

None: 10-11-12-16-22-26-27-28-31-32.

PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51

Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23.

None: 13-14-17-18-22-24-26-27-28-31-32.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51

Con: 1-7-16-21-24-26-30-33.

None: 12-13-17-22-27-28.

SAINT JOAN-10/4/51

Con: 2-4-6-15-23-24-32-33.

None: 12-13-14-17-22-25-31.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

Con: 33. So-So: 25.

None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

Con: 4-25-26-27-30. None: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.

TOP BANANA-11/1/51

Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-16-22-24-26-28-31-32.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-32.

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' Green Room Department '
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CUTRATE PROS...Broadway managers, who have been cool to recent revival attempts of cut-rate ticket agencies, haven't forgotten the boon to the shows which "went over with a Leblang" reminds Abel, Variety. Cut-rate tickets sold at Gray's Drug Store not only kept many a show going, but it developed an honest theatre loving audience. Not the relatively select few to whom going to the theatre now is either a case of fashionable snobbery or a means to entertain out of towners.

COLUMN TIPS...Don Juan in Hell tickets getting \$35 a pair at the broker's informs Winchell...Antony and Cleopatra will be telecast over a closed circuit soon after opening, predicts Walker...NBC turned down TV production of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn because it was too racy, whispers O'Brian.

CRITIC'S DUTY...The reviewer shouldn't tell the producer how to run his business, explains Shulman, London Evening Standard. But he should speak up at any attempt to lower the standards of public taste or to discourage good writing.

THEATRE THOUGHTS...Actors must make repeated appearances in all kinds of plays under various auspices, regardless of the outcome, lectures Clurman, New Republic, to the Hollywood stars who take looks in at the drama every three years...Nina press agent should use actual quotes from pannings as original, honest stunt to bring the customers into the Gloria Swanson play, suggests WNBC Pearson. American playwrights were urged to turn out a play or musical that dares venture into social satire by Lerner, Post.

BEST ACTORS...John Gielgud in London's The Winter's Tale rates nod from Thomas Quinn Curtiss in a letter to Morehouse, WT&S...Julie Harris, I Am A Camera, will be a future first lady of the theatre, surmises Kilgallen, Journal American...Ruark, WT&S, gives prize for best acting of year to T. Lamar Caudle, of the current mink coat drama.

MAIL BAG...Billy Rose in letter to drama editor of WT&S disagreed with columnist Farrell's report that almost a half million dollars worth of Olivier tickets were turned back to him, as owner of the Ziegfeld Theatre, Rose noted that due to the tremendous mail order totals only ten per cent of the tickets went to the brokers, instead of the regular 20 per cent. The theatre owner also pointed out that the ticket brokers and the ticket commissioner praised all concerned in the handling of the tickets.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Lo and Behold!— Booth 12/12/51. Slight majority of daily reviewers panned Theatre Guild's production of John Patrick's new ghost story as neither funny nor scary enough. But News, Post, WT&S and Press critics recommended play starring Leo G. Carroll and Lee Grant. Chapman, News, thought script funny enough to make him wish it were funnier, he recommended tightening. Watts, Post, admitted those too critical might enjoy it, though he did think author was not inventive enough. Hawkins, WT&S, and Eaton, Press, praised it as agreeable and witty. Latter did admit the humor may have been relative in a dull season. Atkinson, Times, and Kerr, Herald Tribune, both enjoyed the first act, but panned play because latter half was not as original or funny. Most of the critics are sure that the author continues to show the promise shown in his Hasty Heart. Supporting cast and direction by Burgess Meredith was generally praised. Stewart Chaney's sets also were applauded. McClain, Journal American just didn't think the play about 4 ghosts was funny.

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' Meet the Critic - Richard Cooke '
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Theatre costs have probably advanced more than other items in the cost of living, Richard Cooke told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. The Wall Street Journal drama editor, who doubles as transportation editor of the national business daily, thinks this is the main reason why more people don't go to the theatre more often. Even among the well to do, who may have gone to the theatre 12 times a year, theatre attendance has been cut. Because they pick and choose their plays more carefully, they actually attend fewer per year, he feels. Though it isn't the sole reason for the increase in prices, union feather bedding in the theatre is bad, just as it is bad in any other industry, Cooke stated.

In his role as drama critic he tries to present the reader with what he considers the good and bad elements in the given production. He doesn't try to predict if the show will be a hit or flop. Taking an objective point of view he tries to describe exactly what kind of an audience would enjoy the given show. In addition to this, he said, his reviews attempt to go into the basic thinking of the script, this, he said, his reviews attempt to go into the basic thinking of the script, evaluating the ideas presented. Cooke has discovered that it is unfair to readers and professionals to be kind to a bad work, for nothing is as mad as an enraged theatre goer who feels he has been stung.

Because his job as transportation editor allows him to travel to the theatres of other countries, Cooke has had a good opportunity to compare American and foreign theatre going. Echoing Gilbert Gabriel's thoughts on foreign play going, Cooke agrees with the Cue critic that play going abroad is much more fun. Not only is it more fun it is much more comfortable and certainly much cheaper. The reviewer feels American theatres would attract more people if the theatres themselves were more attractive and more comfortable.

Cooke is one of those reviewers who turned to the writing of criticism because he liked theatre and because newspapers, with an abundance of openings, needed second string critics. Joining the Wall Street Journal shortly after graduating from Princeton in 1927, Cooke has covered various industries. He has done stock market columns, and been editor of various departments. He did second string theatre and film reviewing for six years before being appointed drama editor and critic in 1939. His reviews appear in all four editions of the national daily.

On the controversial subject of TV's influence on the theatre, the reviewer has not made his final decision. But he does think that many people conceivably will be introduced to theatre and theatre personalities through the new medium. Also TV employs many theatre people between productions. Though he might be considered slightly prejudiced, Cooke does feel it is a cliché to only consider the top eight drama critics as important in forming an audience for a show. It is the combined total opinions of all critics, on large and small media, that make up the theatre going public's mind, he believes.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Shows that closed include Faithfully Yours...Walter F. Kerr named permanent drama critic of Herald Tribune...Claudia Cassidy, Chicago Tribune, has Saturday night TV program on WGN-TV..."Don Juan in Hell" reading will return for four weeks in April. Checks can be sent to Paul Gregory, 152 West 42nd Street, N.Y.C...Audrey Meadows, temporarily replaces Rose Marie in Top Banana...Office of Price Administration exempt-ticket brokers, allowing them to charge \$1 per ticket fee..."Sport," Airedale dog star of Top Banana was tendered a testimonial dinner at McCarthy's Steak House.

